

GUIDE FOR WRITING DESCRIPTORS¹

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The title of an article is one form of an abstract, but because of the need for a short phrase, it cannot be complete or even entirely accurate. No attempt should be made to list all key words in the title. The most that can be done is to give the reader a general idea of the contents of a work. For a broad topic, only a few words are needed for the title, but for the more restricted or specialized topic, more words are needed to show the restriction. It is here that the title fails us. Titles are an adaptation from fiction writing. There never really has been a good system for articles. Perhaps it would be best if all articles were simply given as "An article by John Doe." However, the new system of adding index words, or descriptors has come to our rescue. This system is described here.

Beginning with volume 81 *Entomological News* has used "descriptors" or key words as a means of indexing each document published, either in the journal form or as an article for "Data Documents for Systematic Entomology" [DDSE]. These descriptors are used for indexing each volume. The index to volume 81 is an example of this, and it also shows the use of the three categories of index terms described below.

Volume 82 of *Entomological News* introduces a further modification of the DDSE system. All documents received and accepted for publication in a future issue will be listed in the current issue, the listing to be made just prior to the time the issue goes to press. The list will include the document number, author, date of acceptance, title, and descriptors. The following guide for listing descriptors should be used, and is expected from each author submitting papers for consideration for publication in *Entomological News*.

The rules for writing descriptors are essentially those used for indexing (see Arnett, 1970, pp. 84, 98-99, 125-127). The best way to select descriptors is to examine the text without consideration of the title. All words needed must be listed even if they appear in the title. If the job of selecting descriptors is carefully done, changes and omissions needed in the title may be more obvious.

Descriptors fall into three groups: 1) the subject matter in general terms; 2) place or area included in the article; period of time covered, or terms used to restrict the general subject matter, but not those terms that are included in three; 3) taxa from higher categories to species and subspecies, or phenomena or processes described. Some details of procedure and some examples of these are given in this article, but only by practice in selecting and listing descriptors can one become competent in this part of writing.

The selection of the proper descriptor for the subject matter is the most difficult of the three categories. A great many of the papers in *Entomological News* are of a taxono-

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mic nature. It is not inappropriate to use this word as a descriptor. The type of taxonomic paper may be used also, as revision, review, note, monograph, or similar term. Other papers deal with the "physiology of", the "behavior of", the "life cycle of," and so on.

The geographical location or area covered helps to orient, and, often, eliminate. For example, if a taxonomic paper includes only Old World taxa, then those interested only in data on North American taxa may pass by the paper. Mention of the area in the title is often omitted resulting in a great time loss reading each description trying to determine the area covered. Papers on ecology, behavior, and reports of field experiments should carefully locate the area where the data were gathered. It is likely that physiological research should be geographically oriented for interpretation of certain results. It is difficult to know exactly how geographical areas should be reported, especially when politically determined names are used. Attempts have been made to standardize geographical names, but these have not been accepted generally. For North America, it is relatively simple, the countries seem stable, there is little change in states and provinces. For descriptors, there is seldom need to list more subdivisions unless a particular island, city, institution, or research area is mentioned. Those working in other areas have to use their best judgement.

Names of organisms are the best and easiest to use of the classes of descriptors. Names of taxa of all categories above species are used as index words only. Species, however, should have modifiers. These modifiers must explain why the species is cited as a descriptor when taxa of a higher category would otherwise serve as well. For example, no need to mention all of the species in a generic revision. The name of the genus is sufficient. However, if the data reported are not inclusive for the higher category, the next lower must be used. If this is a species, then the type of information given about the species in the paper is required. This might be a description (give stage), distribution, behavior, reproduction, life cycle, population, or other information.

Finally, in papers dealing with function, the process or processes are given. Since there is no acceptable classification of these processes at the present time each author and editor is on his own for this. I strongly recommend the list as given in the contents of Zoological Record, section 13, Insecta. But this can be improved upon.

Literature cited

Arnett, R. H., Jr. 1970. Entomological information storage and retrieval. Bio-Rand Foundation, Inc., Baltimore, MD 21228. xiii + 210 p.

Descriptors: Titles; descriptors; writing procedure.